

Waking Up the Nation,
One Reader at a Time...

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

As a Phoenix Rising from the Ashes, I'm Still Standing

by Dawn Irons

Battling Lyme disease has been a journey! There were days when it seemed the fight to survive was as intense as what those who survived hurricane Katrina faced, only the storm never seemed to pass. It came to stay.

There were moments when I could not remember a time that I was not sick. I was undiagnosed for 18 years before they discovered it was Lyme and I began treatment.

There was one thing the doctor did tell me when I began treatment: This is going to get worse before it gets better. That was not the news I wanted to hear, but I was braced for the treatment process.

My treatment process lasted 3 grueling years. In that time I think I experienced every emotion, feeling, rage, and desperate thought that is

known to mankind. Though I was never suicidal, there were days I would earnestly pray for God to end the suffering. That deepened when I began seeing the effects of my illness on my family. I came to feel more of a burden than a member of a family.

My participation in normal family events was quite limited due to the illness, pain, and overwhelming fatigue. There were two occasions that I lost my ability to walk and had to be assisted/carried to even use the restroom. Depression seemed to be a constant companion and there seemed no end in sight to the financial strains of the medical treatment. But God was ever-faithful in the midst of the battle with me.

Within a month of my diagnoses, the doctor recommended my husband be tested as well since he suspected that Lyme disease, being



Dawn & her Aunt Dr. Charlene Conner at DBU graduation
a spirochetal illness, may be sexually transmitted. Brad's co-infection of Babesia came back "through the roof" according to the doctor. He said he had never seen a level so high in all of his practice. Then he cautioned us further that we should get the children tested.

A year later the children became sick with what appeared to be a stomach flu. The two boys rebounded in two days. My daughter, by day three, was in a

coma, unresponsive, and the doctors did not know that she would ever wake up or recover. We urgently requested they test for her Lyme disease and they refused saying, "We don't have Lyme disease in Texas.."

They were running tests and gave a tentative diagnosis of meningitis-- atypical. They preventatively put her on IV Rocephin antibiotics pending lab results in the event it was bacterial in nature.

In the meantime,

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we had our Lyme specialist on the phone asking if he felt this could be Lyme-related and he began asking what they were treating her with. We told him and he responded that if it was Lyme-related what they were treating her with would be the same thing he would treat her with and if/when she was discharged from the hospital to get her to Louisiana to his office and he would do a complete Lyme work-up panel from the tick-borne pathogen lab called IgeneX in California.

Within 12 hours of starting IV Rocephin, my daughter was out of the coma and conscious! Upon discharge we took the road trip to LA and sure enough-- her Lyme tests came back positive. The doctor explained to us that there is a form of meningitis that is induced by Lyme disease.

This journey was getting harder by the day and there seemed no end in sight. My treatment protocol was not without risk and dangers-- as no long-term antibiotic therapy is-- during the course of treatment I developed a condition called Pseudotumor Cerebri (PTC) which is a problem that is caused

by excess cerebrospinal fluid in the brain. This came about due to a reaction that both the doctor and I were unaware of that can be caused in overweight people who use doxycycline for long term. I fit the bill, and wouldn't you know, I got PTC.

We switched antibiotics and decided that I would just deal with the issues of PTC as they arose. This was one of the risk-benefits of long term antibiotic treatment that I was willing to take. The bizarre thing was that I had felt better than I ever had while taking doxy! So I completed my treatment protocol on Zithromax, pulsing with Flagyl.

Within 3 years I heard the words I had been longing to hear: REMISSION! It was sort of like that surreal dream sequence in the Wizard of Oz where Dorothy steps out of her black and white world into a new reality of COLOR!

I slowly began to test the waters. We stopped all treatment (with doctor approval) and he said if I ever felt the symptoms were back-- to call and we could restart the protocol. My energy was increasing, my strength

was increasing, and my confidence in my ability to live life again-- was back!

I took the biggest leap of faith that I had ever taken. I had enrolled in graduate school at Dallas Baptist University and began to pursue my masters degree in counseling. This is something I would never have dreamed of attempting prior to remission.

This is not to say there were not road blocks in the way in life-after-Lyme-- there were! But the challenge was to not just assume every health issue was Lyme-related. I already knew that I had developed PTC. That was not going to go away when Lyme was in remission. It was induced by Lyme, but it has a life all its own. So although Lyme was in remission I still had the bear of PTC to deal with.

Soon after starting graduate school I was scheduled for brain surgery to place a ventricular shunt so that my body could help balance the fluid pressure in my brain which caused extreme vertigo and hearing loss. One neurologist said it was definitely related to the PTC and another neurologist felt it was

Meniere's disease-- both strongly related to Lyme disease. To me, I felt it was just time to clean up the mess that Lyme disease had caused and deal with what was left behind. So brain surgery brought immediately relief to the crippling migraine headaches, but the vertigo still continues to be problematic several times a year.

Some friends try to convince me the Lyme is active again. I am not as convinced. I remember what Lyme disease was like. That is not where I am now! I went from being bedridden to now working 2 jobs and going to school again in the fall! I was able to complete the work of my masters degree and now I am working on getting certified in American Sign Language so I can continue my counseling practice if my hearing loss progresses to the point of complete deafness. At that point I could still counsel in the deaf community.

One other casualty of the long-term antibiotic treatment was my gall bladder. I ended up in surgery to remove my gall bladder just 4 weeks after my brain surgery to place the shunt. Risks and benefits... you

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just have know you have made an informed decision about the protocol you choose. I chose. I accepted the risks and benefits. They were my choices to make! I chose a risky path. I reaped some tough consequences of my choices. But I sit here today fully functional, living a full and happy life. I feel I have a new lease on life!

As I look back on my journey now, I truly believe that I have experienced the old metaphor of a phoenix rising from the ashes.

In my healing process, I never stopped

trying to help Lyme disease patients or the doctors and researchers get their information out to the public for education and awareness. The Public Health Alert still continued to turn out a monthly publication for advocacy purposes.

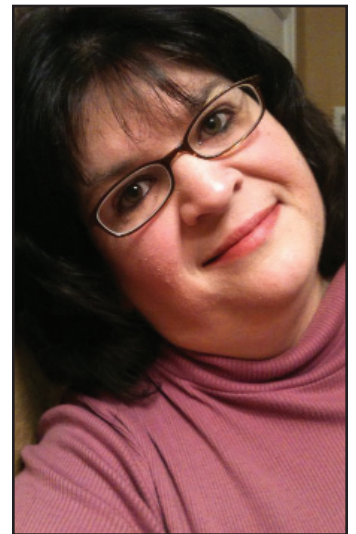
There were times that I did have to emotionally take a step back because there is an inner healing that has to take place after overcoming the trauma of battling a horrific illness like Lyme disease. There were times I really could not write about my experience. I needed to process

it and deal with the damage. The damage was more than just the consequences of treatment! There was damage in my family relationships, my finances, my marriage, my role as mother, and the list goes on... but I do want to offer this bit of encouragement: I'M STILL STANDING-- healed and whole emotionally, and in a medical place of remission. I know that remission offers no guarantee and that can change in a moment. But today-- I am alive and standing! I am living life to the fullest and sucking the marrow out

of the bone of life!

Be encouraged!
There is hope. There is healing! There is life after Lyme disease!

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